

Meditation on the Light
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Cottage Grove United Church of Christ
Cottage Grove, Minnesota
Friday, 24 December, 2010
Christmas Eve
Service of Carols, Candlelight, and Communion

Several years ago a hospital in Woodland, California began playing Brahm's lullaby over the loud speaker every time a new baby was born. When the hospital president introduced the practice, he got *blasted* by hospital staff from the Emergency Room and ICU. "How can you play that festive music, when we are here dealing with the *sick* and *dying*?!" they grumbled.

The hospital president, who had been trying to create a *healing* environment, was pained by the unhappy response to the music. With a little negotiation, he continued playing the song at the birth of every child, but he had the volume turned down a little. For their part, the ER and ICU staff agreed to tolerate it... and it was the president's hope that they would grow to accept the chimes and feel that they were, indeed, part of a healing environment.

... How, indeed, can we play festive chimes in the presence of so much suffering? I was a volunteer chaplain at that hospital, and I was called to respond to more deaths than births. I saw more darkness in the hospital than new life, and I shed more tears of sadness with family members than tears of joy.

While we here at Cottage Grove United Church of Christ saw a surprising number of baptisms this summer, I spent more *time* at the bedsides of the sick and suffering, or with grieving families, than I did with newborns or newlyweds.

... And such is our world. We see so much *darkness* in the world today, so much despair. Wars rage in many places, including our own communities, and the violence becomes hard to bear. Political unrest leaves us emotional and exhausted. We witness family strife, we carry our own grief; we miss loved ones who are no longer with us. We *ache* with trouble, and we find at times that we can barely face a new day.

Like the staff at that hospital, we are so immersed in the *darkness* of the world -- in the death and dying -- that festive chimes seem incongruous. *How can we celebrate at such a time as this?*

Yet those chimes playing through the hospital PA system – even when women and men lay suffering, even when loved ones cried in grief – are a reminder that *life* pushes through the mire, that *light* pushes through the darkness.

Tonight, too, is such a reminder. We do, indeed, know much darkness in our world, and we do, indeed, have much grief. But tonight *life* prevails. Tonight we gather here as people of faith, to remember that the light shall triumph over the darkness, and that *life* will triumph over the death that too often seems to rule. Tonight we gather here to celebrate the birth of *one child* who brought light into the world, and who will bring it *again and again*.

We do not play festive music at the birth of a child, and we do not celebrate the birth of the Jesus, in order to *mock* the sadness that so often surrounds us. We do not rejoice in order to *overtake* the grief, or the illness, that many of us face. But on Christmas Eve, we take time to *remember* that that sadness, that illness, and that grief, will *not* have the final word, no matter where we find ourselves right now.

A few moments ago you heard the ancient words of our scriptures, telling us about the miraculous birth, about the angelic visitations, and about the Word that was there in the beginning and will be there forever. Like Mary, *remember* those words, and treasure them in your hearts... even if, like Mary, you face a difficult road ahead.

Tonight is a reminder that God *is* present, that Christ is reborn in us again, and again, and again. *Celebrate* that new life. And carry that light with you... the light of hope.

In this church tonight, the tiny lights of candles pierce through the darkness. *Take the light with you as you go!* Share it with one another long after you have left this place.

This is a magical night, a night of light, a night of hope, a night that shines in the darkness. See the star from where you are. Let it shine *on* you and *in* you. And know that *life* will prevail.

Now let us pray.